

I am writing in support of HB 5285 as it is vital to our future economic and societal well-being to development of critical thinker's and innovative learners that are engaged in the civic process and are able of developing new systems to take on growing need for climate action. Most of Connecticut's residents are public school learners therefor we must not deny them this important aspect and building block to their education that will leave them better prepared for global competitiveness and foster the engaged citizens we need to take on arguably the biggest challenge facing our nation and the globe, which is climate change. By teaching our children the importance of climate change and how it directly affects their lives and the lives of others they can make informed decisions.

In 1993, CT DEEP enacted its *Environmental Equity Policy*, which states that, "...no segment of the population should, because of its racial or economic makeup, bear a disproportionate share of the risks and consequences of environmental pollution or be denied equal access to environmental benefits.", but a critical component of effective environmental justice is having those communities represented when decisions are made regarding climate planning in our state and local communities. Denying those that attend public schools the right to climate education puts undue burden upon the ability of those students to self-advocate for positive change in their personal and professional lives and communities.

Many of Connecticut's coastal communities of diverse economic backgrounds are already experiencing the disastrous impacts, such as of losing their homes in recent Ida flooding, to unpreparedness for the changes which we are already experiencing. The impacts of increased flooding, increased storms, and raised prices for basic necessities such as shelter, water, food, heat, and electricity hit us all but hit low income communities, and low lying communities hardest.

Lastly, we must reinvest in the engagement of our young learners and future civic leaders. It is our responsibility to reignite their investment in our country and its democratic future. For some of us, we have lead fortunate lives, where this love of democracy began when our parents took us to the voting booths or the Town Council meetings. However, so many, disproportionately impacting black and brown families, for a variety of reasons, be it Voter ID laws, incarceration, lack of access to absentee voting or early voting – equitable representation and equitable voice in outcomes regarding employment, education, and general community investment remains too elusive. Please support this Bill to ensure and invest in a stronger future for Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Katherine N. LoBalbo  
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